

2. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

2.1 HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

The Lydgate Park-Kapa‘a bike/pedestrian path is one part of a longer, 16-mile shared use path that has been proposed for the east side of Kaua‘i from Nāwiliwili to Anahola. The idea for the path was first proposed in the early 1990s by a citizen advisory group convened by the County Council. The advisory group was named Ke Ala Hele Makalae, which translates to “the path that goes along the shore,” and continues to meet on a semi-regular basis. Planning for bikeways gained momentum with the cessation of agricultural production, a momentous change in land use that raised the possibility of adapting and reusing former cane haul roads.

Also in the early 1990s, the State Department of Transportation began updating its bicycle master plan, called *Bike Plan Hawaii*. Members of Ke Ala Hele Makalae participated in the planning effort. Their advocacy led to a proposal in the 1994 edition of *Bike Plan Hawaii* for a “coastal bikepath” connecting the two main population centers of Līhu‘e and Kapa‘a and extending beyond. (This proposal was endorsed in the 2003 update of *Bike Plan Hawaii*.)

In the meantime, a grassroots initiative had taken hold at Lydgate Park leading to the design and construction of Kamalani Playground and later Kamalani Bridge. The time contributed by volunteer workers who built the bridge—hundreds of hours in sweat equity valued at \$550,000—was used to satisfy the County’s match toward a grant of \$2.6 million obtained from the federal government. These funds were used to plan and build 2.3 miles of bicycle/pedestrian paths and amenities in Lydgate Park. The project was completed in 2003.

Following the Lydgate Park Bike/Pedestrian Path, the County began planning a shared use path from Waika‘ea Canal to Keālia. This project includes coastal land conveyed to the County of Kaua‘i from the State of Hawai‘i through a series of Executive Orders, and land dedicated by the private landowner of the Keālia Kai Subdivision to fulfill a condition of the Special Management Area Permit and subdivision approval. The new path will start at Waika‘ea Canal and extend approximately 4.3 miles to Ahihi Point in the northern Keālia area. There is an existing, one-mile asphalt bike path between Waika‘ea Canal and the Smokey Louie Public Swimming Pool that will be rebuilt as part of this project.

The private property dedicated in Keālia is providing the local match for the Kapa‘a-Keālia path and will contribute toward the local match elsewhere in the path system. The design-build phase of the Kapa‘a-Keālia bike/pedestrian path began in 2005.

Planning for the Lydgate Park-Kapa‘a Bike/Pedestrian Path started in late 2003 as a connection between the previous sections. It also traverses the most urbanized section of

the overall path and is, therefore, accessible to a large concentration of potential users. For this reason, and in response to the urgings of residents who attended Ka Leo (town-hall style) public meetings in Wailua House Lots and Kawaihau, two “connector routes” were added to the main north-south “trunk” line project. The proposed routes will increase the safety of people who walk and bicycle through the hillside communities of Wailua House Lots and Kawaihau.

The fourth project in the path system will start at Lydgate Park and extend approximately 4 miles south to Ahukini and bring the network close to Līhu‘e, the county seat. Planning for the Lydgate-Ahukini shared use path began in 2005. It has been followed by a fifth project, covering the distance from Ahukini to Nāwiliwili Harbor, a debarkation point for thousands of cruise ship passengers. Planning for the sixth project, also underway, will extend the north end of the path from Keālia to Anahola.

2.2 PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

The bike/pedestrian path project addresses several needs and objectives:

- Improved safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and others using non-motorized modes of transportation
- Increased choices among alternative modes of transportation
- Greater connections among destination nodes
- Enhanced access to natural areas, while minimizing impacts on sensitive ecosystems
- Increased opportunities for recreation and physical fitness
- Increased potential for economic activities associated with use of the path
- Implementation of bikeway proposals in the *Kaua‘i General Plan* and *Bike Plan Hawaii*

Improved Safety for Pedestrians, Bicyclists, and Others Using Non-motorized Modes of Travel.

Historically, transportation agencies at all levels of government focused on roadway construction. In 1991, Congress passed historic legislation that set a new direction for transportation policy. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA called “ice tea”) recognized that bicycling and walking are part of a balanced transportation system. ISTEA required that a portion of the nation’s transportation budget be set aside to improve transportation for non-motorized modes of transportation and mandated that state long-range transportation plans address the full range of transportation needs. The trickle-down of federal policy has helped local governments to improve transportation facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians.

In terms of bicycling, “the Federal policy goal ... is to accommodate current use and to encourage increased use, while enhancing safety” (FHWA 1994: 1). The FHWA and AASHTO have adopted the concept of the “design cyclist” as a means of classifying bicycle users and recommending appropriate types of bicycle facilities. The classification system involves three tiers: Group A includes experienced riders, Group B includes basic bicyclists (casual or new adult and teenage riders), and Group C includes children. Generally, Group A riders are best served by making every street “bicycle-friendly,” while Group B/C bicyclists are best served by a network of neighborhood streets and designated bicycle facilities (FHWA 1994). Since Kaua‘i County has determined that the subject facility should be accessible to the broadest range of users in age and skill, and recognized that there will be more novice riders than advanced bicyclists, the project has been planned as a shared use path.

In terms of walking, the *Pedestrian Facilities Users Guide* calls on transportation planners to assume that people will walk: “People will want to walk everywhere they can, and a comfortable, inviting, and safe environment should be provided for them.” (FHWA 2002) The *Pedestrian Guide* specifically mentions traffic as a potential detractor from a walkable environment. It notes that high-volume, high-speed traffic can inhibit a person’s feeling of safety and comfort by creating a “fence effect,” where the street seems to be an impenetrable barrier.

At present, bicyclists, as well as pedestrians and joggers in the project area use shoulders or the sides of roads, or share sidewalks where available. The proposed action will increase the safety of this situation by separating those on foot and on bicycles from passing vehicles. To accommodate a mix of users, the path will have a design width of 10-12 feet, as recommended in guidelines published by AASHTO (1999).

Increased Choices among Alternative Modes of Transportation

Shared use paths have been popular across the nation because separating motor vehicles from bicyclists and pedestrians increases the sense of safety and comfort. These characteristics are fundamental to giving people viable choices in how they travel. The proposed path is intended for use by all age groups, and those who possess a range of skill levels. It will facilitate the mobility of youths, elderly people, and others who do not drive or have access to automobiles. This is particularly important in a region, such as Wailua-Kapa‘a, where the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2000 data show that 43% of households have children under the age of 18, compared to 38% of households statewide. The path—and its feeder routes—are expected to ease the concerns of some parents who have expressed reluctance in allowing their children to walk or ride bicycles. If children and teens are able to exercise greater independence and mobility, families would have more flexibility and choices when making transportation arrangements to support everyday activities.

Better Connections to Popular Destinations

The proposed action will furnish a path located between an existing path (at Lydgate Park) and a path that is currently in design and construction (from Kapa‘a to Keālia). In effect, the project supplies a missing link. It is the continuity of the path system—what transportation specialists call “system connectivity”—that will increase the usefulness of the facility. An expanded network allows people to go where they want to go.

This project would provide access to popular destinations, such as the resort area, shopping centers (Coconut Marketplace, Waipouli Town Center, Kaua‘i Village Shopping Center, and Kapa‘a Shopping Center), schools, churches, and other community facilities. Combined with the contiguous Kapa‘a-Keālia segment, the path will run the entire length of the urbanized area. Those living in the south part of the urban area, for example in Wailua House Lots, could walk or bike all the way to the Kapa‘a Neighborhood Center, public library, or swimming pool at the north end.

The utility of the path will also be increased by the two connector segments that are included in this project. The proposed path serving Wailua House Lots will provide access between the well-used community park and Wailua Beach Park. The proposed path in the Kawaihau residential area will connect the north-south bike/pedestrian path with the existing Kawaihau path, which currently ends near Kapa‘a Elementary School. Residents in both neighborhoods have expressed support for the pathways through the Ka Leo public meetings.

Enhanced Access to Natural Areas

The Wailua-Waipouli-Kapa‘a area is surrounded by natural places of great scenic beauty. The proposed action will enable residents and visitors to access some of these places under conditions that are better controlled than they are at present. Beach access is a traditional part of the island lifestyle, supported by numerous laws, government regulations, and court actions. Despite efforts to preserve mauka-makai and lateral accesses, as land is developed, it is sometimes difficult for members of the public to determine where the public lands are or where they can go without trespassing on private property. The path would indicate a clear travel way.

In other places, sensitive ecosystems may be of concern. Here, too, defined pathways would give people an opportunity to enjoy natural areas with reduced impact on the resources, by limiting places where people can walk and bicycle.

For those who require wheelchairs (as well as parents with children in strollers), a hard, smooth surface will make it easier to travel through the outdoors, especially in places that are sandy, rocky, or covered with grass. To the extent that it is technically feasible, the path will be designed in compliance with guidelines established under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Increased Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation and Fitness

The proposed path is needed to provide increased opportunities for outdoor recreation and fitness. There is no other area in town that provides a safe, dedicated facility for people to walk, jog, and bicycle. Recent reports by the Centers for Disease Control and U.S. Surgeon General, among others, indicate that obesity and related chronic health problems have reached near-epidemic proportions (see for example, Carmona, 2003 and Gerberding, 2005). With its share of tobacco settlement funds, the State of Hawaii has embarked on a major health awareness campaign called the Hawai‘i Health Initiative in which “Get Active” is a cornerstone of the campaign. Sedentary lifestyles are blamed, in part, and facilities that enable greater physical activity have become even more important assets for a community’s health and well-being.

Support for the Region’s Economic Base

Another objective of the project is to support tourism, the region’s economic base. This project will not provide space for commercial or concessionaire activities. However, across the country, other places with popular bike paths and rails-to-trails have found that their facilities have contributed to entrepreneurial growth, as small businesses step in to offer bike rental and repair, refreshment sales, and related goods and services.

A path through and around resort areas is expected to spur greater mobility and circulation throughout. Visitors will find it easier, and likely more pleasant, to stroll between their lodgings and shops and restaurants. In addition, given the regional scope of the proposed path system and its scenic qualities, it could emerge as an important visitor attraction. The bike/pedestrian path would add a new activity for visitors, perhaps warranting an extension of their stay. Moreover, the path is consistent with the type of activities favored by the ecotourism market, and could help the local industry tap into this niche.

Implementation of Bikeway Proposals in County and State Plans

The proposed action is mentioned in the *Kaua‘i General Plan* (2000) and in *Bike Plan Hawaii* (1994, 2003). The *General Plan* states that the “proposed bike path would offer scenic views of the Kapa‘a-Lihu‘e coastline, and would offer an excellent alternative for bicyclists commuting between Kapa‘a and Līhu‘e.” However, the Plan also notes that for future bikeway development to occur along the coast, “major efforts will be needed to acquire sufficient right-of-way, and to gain public and landowner support for a continuous bike path” (p. 7-10).

Bike Plan Hawaii, the HDOTs bicycle master plan, was updated in 2003. The latest version of the plan carried over a proposal first included in the 1994 edition, for a “coastal bike path” from Nāwiliwili to Anahola. Both the *General Plan* and *Bike Plan Hawaii* were developed with extensive community participation. Consistent endorsement of the bike/pedestrian path proposal indicates steady community support for over a lengthy period and in different planning venues.

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